

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CAB-02 CIAE-00 COME-00 DODE-00
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R 111313Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9046
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMCONSUL FRANKFURT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 BRUSSELS 1336

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: EAIR, BE, CU
SUBJECT: CIVAIR: SECOND U.S. LANDING POINT, AND OTHER SCHEDULED
AIRLINE DEVELOPMENTS

REF: 76 BRUSSELS 4752 (NOTAL), 76 BRUSSELS 997 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY. BELGIAN CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITIES HAVE
TOLD US THAT THEIR CLEAR PREFERENCE FOR A SECOND U.S.
LANDING POINT FOR SABENA IS ATLANTA. OTHER LOCAL
DEVELOPMENTS HAVE RECENTLY OCCURRED AFFECTING SCHEDULED
AIR TRAFFIC BETWEEN BELGIUM AND NORTH AMERICA (AND THE
CARIBBEAN). SABENA HAS ANNOUNCED AN END TO SERVICE
TO HAVANA, AFTER LESS THAN A YEAR OF OPERATION. AIR
CANADA HAS ANNOUNCED AN END TO SERVICE TO BRUSSELS,
LEAVING SABENA'S BRUSSELS-MONTREAL SERVICE AS THE ONLY
DIRECT SERVICE BETWEEN BELGIUM AND CANADA. AND PAN AM
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HAS ANNOUNCED THAT IT IS INCREASING ITS USE OF BRUSSELS AS
A CENTER FOR CARGO SERVICE. FINALLY, A NON-DEVELOPMENT:
THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT POSITION ON THE MCKINSEY STUDY
(RECOMMENDING MERGER OF SABENA, KLM AND LUXAIR), WHICH WAS
PROMISED BY THE END OF 1976, HAS YET TO BE DECIDED. END
SUMMARY.

2. SECOND U.S. LANDING POINT: ATLANTA PREFERRED. (SEE 76 BRUSSELS 4752--NOTAL). IN A RECENT CONVERSATION WITH US, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION VANDERPERREN INFORMALLY BROUGHT UP THE MATTER OF A SECOND U.S. LANDING POINT FOR SABENA, SAYING THAT IT WAS THE ONLY BILATERAL CIVIL AIR ISSUE OF SUBSTANTIAL INTEREST TO BELGIUM. HE CONFIRMED WHAT SABENA REPRESENTATIVES HAVE BEEN IMPLYING; THAT ATLANTA IS DEFINITELY THE BELGIANS' CHOICE. VANDERPERREN NOTED IN PASSING, AND WITHOUT EMPHASIS, THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS NOT RESPONDED TO LAST YEAR'S BELGIAN PRESENTATION IN SUPPORT OF THE REQUEST FOR A SECOND LANDING SITE. HE HINTED THAT THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT MIGHT SOON RENEW ITS EFFORTS WITH THE NEW U.S. ADMINISTRATION. SABENA HAS A LETTER WRITTEN IN 1972 BY THEN-GEORGIA GOVERNOR CARTER, RESPONDING TO SABENA'S INITIATIVE, ENCOURAGING SABENA AND OTHER AIRLINES TO OPERATE INTERNATIONAL SERVICE TO ATLANTA. THE BELGIANS ARE UNDER NO ILLUSIONS THAT THIS ANCIENT CORRESPONDENCE IN ANY WAY COMMITTS PRESIDENT CARTER TO SUPPORT SABENA'S REQUEST, BUT THEY THINK THEIR LONG-TIME INTEREST IN ATLANTA IMPROVES THE LIKELIHOOD OF GETTING A SYMPATHETIC HEARING FROM HIS ADMINISTRATION.

3. SABENA SERVICE TO HAVANA ENDING ANOTHER AIRLINE SCHEDULE DEVELOPMENT, SABENA HAS ANNOUNCED IT WILL END THE ONCE-A-WEEK SERVICE TO HAVANA AND GUATEMALA ON APRIL 1. SERVICE WAS BEGUN IN MAY 1976. THE COMPANY CITED "TECHNICAL REASONS" FOR THE DECISION, NAMELY SABENA'S PLANNED CHANGE OF EQUIPMENT ON THAT ROUTE FROM BOEING 707 TO 747; THE LATTER CANNOT AT PRESENT BE ACCOMMODATED AT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE HAVANA AIRPORT. COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER CHABERT WENT TO CUBA THIS WEEK TO PREPARE FOR NEXT WEEK'S MEETING IN BRUSSELS OF THE BELGIUM-CUBA MIXED COMMISSION. ACCORDING TO A MEMBER OF HIS STAFF, CHABERT TOLD THE CUBANS THAT THE DECISION TO HALT BRUSSELS-HAVANA SERVICE CAN BE RECONSIDERED WHEN TWO CONDITIONS ARE MET: (A) UPGRADING OF HAVANA'S AIRPORT TO HANDLE THE 747, AND (B) BETTER PROSPECTS FOR TOURIST TRAFFIC. (DGCA VANDERPERREN HAS TOLD US THAT SABENA GOT FAR LESS BUSINESS ON THE HAVANA SERVICE THAN HAD BEEN HOPED, BUT ALSO THAT WORKING AND LIVING CONDITIONS FOR SABENA'S PERSONNEL IN HAVANA WERE UNSATISFACTORY. CUBAN AUTHORITIES PLACED OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF FINDING HOUSING, OFFICE SPACE, AND EVEN PERSONEL CARS. VANDERPERREN SAID IT WAS HIS IMPRESSION THAT THE CUBANS AND THEIR SOVIET MENTORS DO NOT WANT WESTERN AIRLINES OPERATING IN HAVANA. HE SAID THAT WHEN HE NEGOTIATED THE LANDING RIGHTS IN 1975, COMMERCIAL PROSPECTS FOR THE ROUTE WERE THOUGHT TO BE FAIRLY GOOD.)

4. AIR CANADA GIVES UP BRUSSELS SERVICE. AIR CANADA ENDED SERVICE TO BRUSSELS (AS WELL AS MOSCOW AND PRAGUE) AT THE END OF JANUARY, FOR STRICTLY COMMERCIAL REASONS. AIR CANADA WAS SERVING BETWEEN TORONTO AND BRUSSELS, WHILE SABENA FLIES FOUR FLIGHTS PER WEEK (3 VIA B-707, 1 VIA B-747) BETWEEN MONTREAL AND BRUSSELS. (IN APRIL SABENA WILL SHIFT TO THRICE-WEEKLY SERVICE, ALL VIA 747.) THE TWO AIRLINES HAVE WORKED OUT AN ARRANGEMENT TO ASSURE GOOD CONNECTIONS THROUGH MONTREAL (MIRABEL) FOR TORONTO-ORIGINATING PASSENGERS BOUND FOR BRUSSELS.

5. PAN AM EXPANDING USE OF BRUSSELS FOR CARGO TRAFFIC. PAN AM HAS ANNOUNCED THAT IT IS FOCUSING ITS NORTH ATLANTIC CARGO TRAFFIC ON THREE MAIN EUROPEAN CENTERS--LONDON, FRANKFURT AND BRUSSELS. AT PRESENT FIVE B-747F PAN AM FLIGHTS PER WEEK OPERATE TO AND FROM BRUSSELS, IN ADDITION TO THE SUBSTANTIAL CARGO CARRIED ON THE DAILY NEW YORK-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BRUSSELS PASSENGER RUN. IN THE SUMMER OF 1976 PAN AM'S CARGO FLIGHTS FROM BRUSSELS TEMPORARILY WENT UP TO 16 PER WEEK (NOT ALL B-747). PAN AM HOPES TO HANDLE 100,000 TONS PER ANNUM AT BRUSSELS' ZAVENTEM AIRPORT BY 1988. THIS PLAN CAN ONLY BE REALIZED IF BELGIAN AVIATION AUTHORITIES UNDERTAKE THE NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE.

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NSC-05 IO-13 ARA-06 /073 W
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RUFHBTWXAMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG 9259
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

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6. BELGIAN POSITION ON MCKINSEY STUDY STILL NOT ANNOUNCED.
(SEE 76 BRUSSELS 997 AND 4752--BOTH NOTAL.) THE 1976
STUDY BY THE AMERICAN ECONSULTANT, MCKINSEY, RECOMMENDED
THAT STEPS BE TAKEN TOWARD GREATER COORDINATION---AND
EVENTUALLY COMPLETE INTEGRATION--OF THE OPERATIONS OF
SABENA, KLM AND LUXAIR. THE STUDY WAS COMMISSIONED BY
THE COMMUNICATIONS MINISTRIES OF THE THREE BENELUX
COUNTRIES, AND ITS CONCLUSIONS WERE MADE PUBLIC LAST
SPRING. AT THAT TIME BELGIAN COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER
CHABERT PROMISED TO STUDY THE REPORT, DISCUSS IT WITH
HIS DUTCH AND LUXEMBOURGER COUNTERPARTS, AND ANNOUNCE
THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEWS BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR. FIVE
WEEKS AFTER HIS SELF-IMPOSED DEADLINE, HAS HAS NOT YET
COMMENTED, HOWEVER, NOR IS HE LIKELY TO IN THE IMMEDIATE
FUTURE. DGCA VANDERPERREN HAS TOLD US THAT THERE IS
RELUCTANCE TO SET THIS HIGHLY ECMOTIONAL ISSUE BEFORE
THE BELGIAN POPULATION AGAIN IN A PERIOD WHEN THE
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GOVERNMENT'S SURVIVAL IN OFFICE IS THREATENED BY OTHER
HARD ISSUES. (BACKGROUND: THE BELGIAN LINGUISTIC
COMMUNITIES DIVIDE BITTERLY ON THE ISSUE OF A MERGER
OF BENELUX AIRLINES, AS ON MANY ANOTHER ISSUE. DUTCH-
SPEAKING FLEMINGS CAN CONTEMPLATE MERGER OF SABENA WITH
KLM WITH EQUANIMITY, ALTHOUGH THEY ARE NOT PLEASED
AT THE PROSPECT. THEY WOULD RATHER SEE A MERGER THAN
HAVE THE BELGIAN FLAG CARRIER A CONSTANT LOSS LEADER OF THE
BELGIAN ECONOMY. FRENCH-SPEAKING BELGIANS, HOWEVER,
BITTERLY OPPOSE THE PROSPECT OF "ABSORPTION" OF THE
BELGIAN AIRLINE BY THE DUTCH, AND THE DOMINANCE OF DUTCH
SPEAKERS IN THE DIRECTION AND OPERATION OF THE COMPANY
WHICH THAT WOULD ENTAIL.)

7. ACCORDING TO VANDERPERREN--WHO HAS NOT YET SUBMITTED
SUGGESTIONS TO CHABERT ON WHAT THE BELGIAN POSITION SHOULD
BE--THE SITUATION IS MADE EVEN MORE DIFFICULT BY THE FACT
THAT SINCE THE MCKINSEY STUDY WAS COMPLETED KLM HAS
RETURNED TO PROFITABLE OPERATIONS, WHILE SABENA REMAINS
A STEADY LOSER. UNTIL SABENA CAN NEGOTIATE ON SOMETHING
MORE LIKE AN EQUAL FOOTING WITH KLM, THERE IS NO POINT IN
TALKING ABOUT STEPS TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MCKINSEY

RECOMMENDATIONS. IN FACT, HE ADDS, THE SABENA MANAGEMENT HAS NOT COME FORWARD WITH ANY PLANS TO PUT ITS OWN HOUSE IN ORDER, NOR HAS IT EXPLORED WITH KLM EVEN THE SMALLEST STEPS TOWARD GREATER COOPERATION, SUCH AS COMBINING SALES OPERATIONS IN SOME CITIES ABROAD. RENNER

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